



News Release

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Release 2001-67

IDWR DESIGNATES GROUND WATER MANAGEMENT AREAS IN THOUSAND SPRINGS, AMERICAN FALLS REGIONS

For Immediate Release
Boise, Idaho - Aug. 6, 2001

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Severe drought conditions have prompted the Idaho Department of Water Resources to declare two limited areas of southern Idaho as ground water management areas (GWMAs), the agency announced today.

The action, outlined in orders signed late Friday by IDWR Director Karl J. Dreher, provides the administrative framework by which IDWR can take action to strictly regulate ground water use in the areas according to the Prior Appropriation Doctrine of water rights administration as implemented by Idaho law.

That doctrine, known generically as "First in Time is First In Right," requires that when supplies of water are limited, senior or older water rights must get their share of water before junior water rights can be exercised.

Ground water use in the two areas has reduced spring flows that feed the Snake River, whose water levels are already impacted by the severe drought. That means surface water users who get their water from the springs and the Snake River, and whose water rights are generally senior in priority to those of the ground water users, are not getting the full amount of water to which they are entitled. The GWMA action allows IDWR to curtail ground water use by junior water right holders to increase water supplies needed to fill the more senior water rights.

The GWMAs apply to land areas that extend out up to approximately 8-10 miles from the Snake River in southern and eastern Idaho, although regulation of ground water use would involve a more limited area within the GWMAs.

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The first GWMA is the American Falls Ground Water Management Area. It covers an area on either side of the Snake River starting just west of Shelley and running to a point just west of Minidoka Dam.

The second GWMA is the Thousand Springs Ground Water Management Area. It is on the north side of the Snake River starting at approximately Kimberly and running to a point east of King Hill.

IDWR will decide by August 28 if curtailment of ground water use in limited areas within either or both GWMA's is appropriate to protect senior surface water rights. If curtailment is required, IDWR will determine which water rights would need to be curtailed on a time priority basis, and in what specific areas within the boundaries of the GWMA. Domestic wells and other small or nonconsumptive uses would be exempt and not affected by the curtailment orders.

Idaho law requires that the curtailment order must be given by September 1 to be effective for the next year.

Should curtailment orders be issued, they would be based on water right priority and apply equally to all uses of ground water except domestic and other small or nonconsumptive uses. The orders would require junior ground water users to stop or reduce diverting ground water in amounts greater than 0.1 Cubic Feet Per Second (approximately 65,000 gallons per day) from April 1 through December 31, 2002.

Director Dreher also noted that any curtailment orders issued would be rescinded if the drought ends and senior surface water rights have a full water supply, including natural flow and storage water, or if ground water supply levels in the areas significantly improve.

Director Dreher also said curtailment orders will not be issued if agreements can be reached between junior-priority water right holders and entities representing holders of senior-priority surface water rights on the use of out-of-priority water.

Information about the two new management areas can be found in the "Special Interest" segment of the IDWR web site. The address is **www.idwr.state.id.us**.

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Editor's Note: Copies of the orders, maps and other background information is available on the IDWR web site at: www.idwr.state.id.us